

LIVING WATER.

"For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel," Isaiah xliv. 3—5.

THE Lord's people are very often an afflicted people, ready to sink in their minds, notwithstanding the great things he does for them. But though fearful and faint-hearted when they see themselves alone, yet are they bold as a lion when the Captain of their salvation goes before them. When they are oppressed with unbelief and despondency, it is because they feel that they have a carnal, unholy heart; not only destitute of grace, but likewise full of wickedness and sin. They find nothing in themselves, upon which they can build as a ground of comfort. In order, therefore, to strengthen their hearts, the Divine promises are scattered throughout the word. The precious portion of Scripture above-mentioned is fraught with joy and consolation to the mourners in Zion, to those who walk in darkness, and have no light, to those who feel their need of, and would wish to have an interest in the grace of God which bringeth salvation. Here, indeed, are great and precious promises given, not to those who have such and such qualifications,—to these, such promises, sweet as they are, would be superfluous, they find no need of them,—but to the thirsty, to those who are compared to dry and parched ground, and consequently see their need of Christ. We will

I. Mention the characters to whom these promises are made.

II. Explain the precious promises here mentioned.

III. Show the fruits or effects of these promises, in the persons who are interested in them.

IV. Make a short improvement.

I. We shall point out the characters to whom these promises are made.

All the promises are centered in Christ. In him they are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God, 2 Cor. i. 20. The Lord speaks comfort to the church in these words, by the name of Jacob and Israel. The one is a name of weakness, the other of power. Esau's observation upon Jacob's name was, that he was rightly so called, insomuch as he had supplanted him twice, first of his birthright, and then of his blessing. The name of Israel he obtained, when he had power over the Angel, and prevailed. Israel signifieth one that hath prevailed, a prince with God.

The church in herself is weak and frail, and can do nothing; but when she, by faith in her glorious Redeemer, layeth hold upon God, she always prevaleth; for we "are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

II. We shall explain these precious promises.

"I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." By water we are to understand the salutary influences of the Holy Ghost the Comforter. These he shall communicate to the soul who is in distress, who sees his great need of Christ as a Saviour. As water refreshes the weary traveller fatigued with heat, and panting with thirst, just so the glad tidings of salvation bring joy to the sinner's soul. Grace is a most precious thing, and when the Lord means to bestow it, he puts a strong desire in the soul after it. Indeed, this unfeigned desire is a degree of grace; and such as ask sincerely will be sure to obtain. Thirst is the strongest and most impatient of all our appetites. It must be satisfied. Spiritual thirst says, Give me Christ, or else I die. Our spiritual desires are never in vain—they will, they must be satisfied. What does our Lord himself say of this spiritual thirst? "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink," John vii. 37. And again: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," Rev. xxii. 17.

"And floods upon the dry ground." The soul may not only be thirsty, but even like a piece of dry and parched ground. There may be not only a sense of need, of great inexpressible need, but likewise a feeling of great misery. The soul may be dry, hard and barren, like a rock, or a piece

of hardened ground. In some such situation was king David's soul, in the wilderness of Judah. He makes a comparison of the place he was in, to show the state of his soul ; " My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is," Psa. lxiii. 1. King David was then locked up from the means. But it may happen that a Christian may enjoy the means, and yet find himself hard under them. Pitiable as such a situation is, others have been in the like, and have found relief through the promise. What is the language of such a soul ? I have not a spark of grace. 'Why, then, if such be thy case, come to Christ. Oh ! but says the soul, I have a hard heart—I cannot pray—if I could have freedom to pray—if I could shed a tear—if I could open my heart to my God, I were happy. Is this your case ? Poor soul, you are the very person for whom the promise is made, and to whom the words of encouragement are directed. Your heart is a very wilderness—perfectly hard, and without sense or feeling. Hear the promise made to such : " For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water," Isa. xxxv. 6, 7. Nay, there is comfort for a case still more deplorable : " When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys : I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water," Isa. xli. 17, 18. Perhaps you cannot pray ; you find your heart hard, and you cannot find a word to say. You are the very person here described. You would wish to pray, but you cannot do it. Why, then, God shall not only give you a draught of water to quench your thirst, but he shall even pour floods upon you. A single shower would not do. You have had a long drought : he will rain plentifully—he will pour a flood upon you. When you get relief, whatever time it be, your comfort shall be large, and your peace lasting. When the Lord's heritage is weary, he shall send a plentiful rain to confirm it. And in consequence of this hardness, the corruptions may be gathering strength in the soul, and awful and horrid thoughts may arise in the heart. The Lord therefore promises that he will take this likewise

away ; for says he, “ I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.” The Holy Ghost the Comforter is promised to all the people of God. His office is not only to convince of sin, but likewise to strengthen the soul. Pardon of sin is the great blessing which the Redeemer has purchased for his people ; it is whispered to the conscience by the blessed Spirit, through the word. The word speaks peace to all that forsake sin, and turn to God. But although we be reconciled, and although the word speaketh peace, yet that peace may not be intimated to the conscience. The true Christian will be afraid of a false peace, and can never take peace, till he sees his warrant from the word of God. The Spirit shines upon the promise, and makes him see that it belongs to him. This he does by breaking the power of unbelief, and by convincing the conscience of the truth of the promise, as he formerly convinced him of the truth of the threatening. The law says to the conscience, Thou art a sinner. The Spirit shines upon the word to the soul, “ That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” 1 Tim. i. 15. In some such way the blessed Spirit speaks peace to the soul. And the sinner ought to be diligent in the means of grace, and in examination of his conscience. And if he cannot find good and holy qualifications within himself, he cannot deny, at any rate, that he can find in himself qualities that will afford occasion for Christ to show himself a precious Saviour. If, instead of holiness, he finds nothing but the leprosy of sin, he can apply to the Saviour in the words of the poor leper formerly, “ Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” Matt. viii. 2. If he finds himself hard, without repentance, he can tell his Saviour that he has heard about him, that he is exalted as a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins,” Acts v. 31. If he finds unbelief working, he may say, Lord, I would wish to believe ; help my unbelief. Whatever be the corruption which is working within him, the power of Christ can cure him. Let us believe, for to such as believe all things are possible.

III. We shall show the fruits or effects of these promises in the persons who are interested in them : “ They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.” Nothing shoots forth quicker than the grass, when the rain and the dew fall upon it ; and of all trees and

vegetables, none has such a quick growth as the willow by the water courses. In such manner shall be the growth and progress of the true Christian, when his soul is revived with the dew and rain from above. He “shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.—His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon,” Hos. xiv. It is in the nature of grace to grow and to produce fruit, but like every other plant, it requires the rain; and when the showers from above are withheld, it will begin to droop and wither; but when refreshed with the heavenly dew, it will grow, and “bring forth much fruit.” And as it is in nature, so it is likewise in grace; sometimes the dews fall, and revive the vegetable creation, and yet the nicest ear cannot hear them—the sharpest eye cannot see them. At other times, the rain distils in small drops; sometimes in large refreshing showers; and sometimes even in storms and tempests. But however the rain falls upon the earth, it is sure to do good. In like manner, some are brought from darkness to light by imperceptible degrees; by the blessing of God upon a pious education; some are turned from sin to righteousness in their younger years, but without any sensible terrors; others, again, are brought to mount Sinai—they are brought home by the thunder and lightning of the law, set home with all its terrors upon their consciences, before they come to Christ for the salvation which he freely offers. But by whatever means they are brought, happy are they who are found in Christ, “They shall spring up as among the grass, as the willows by the water courses.” They shall grow in grace, and proceed from strength to strength, until they appear perfect at last before God in Zion. And they will give proofs of this their growth in grace: for “one shall say, I am the Lord’s.” That is, he shall lay claim to Christ, he shall come to the Redeemer, and close with him by the faith of the gospel, yielding up himself to be saved by his grace, and to be governed by his laws. He comes to Christ, and shall not be cast out. If he cannot say that Christ is his, at least he will attempt to say that he is Christ’s. Though he cannot say with full assurance that Christ loves him; yet he can say with Peter, that he loves Christ. If he cannot say that Christ has drawn him, yet he can say with humility, “Draw me, we will run after thee.” He will be pleading with the Lord, that he is a merciful God. Though the Lord appear to refuse him,

yet will he, like the woman of Canaan, be always pursuing him, Matt. xv. 22—28. That blessed woman could not then say, Christ is mine; but yet she pleads kindness, she urges her suit, continues her importunity, and at last obtains her request. The soul must do the same, he must be always seeking the Saviour, always throwing himself at his feet, always wrestling against unbelief, and never give over till he obtains the victory. The Lord will give the blessing to his child; but the child must wrest it, as it were, out of his hands. The Lord, it is true, promises to sprinkle clean water upon his people,—to give them a new heart, and take away the heart of stone; but yet will he be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them. See Ezek. xxxvi. The words are very easily repeated, “I am the Lord’s;” but it costs a struggle to believe them, and repeat them by faith. To lay hold upon Christ, and keep it fast, will be found hard. Scripture, and the sense of feeling in the people of God, say so.

“And another shall call himself by the name of Jacob.” He shall join himself to the church and people of God. To enjoy the privilege of worshipping God with his people in spirit and in truth, is the great happiness of every true Israelite. To be an Israelite, and to be a member of the church, are synonymous terms. The church is the mystical body of Christ, and faith alone can make us true members thereof.

“And another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.” When a person gives his consent to any bargain or contract, he signs or subscribes it. To subscribe with the hand unto the Lord, is as much as to give consent to the terms of the everlasting covenant. When a woman marries, she takes her husband’s name. The soul gives its consent to Christ, and is called by his name. The smallest degree of grace or faith must acquiesce in the covenant as well ordered in all things and sure.

We must give up our will to the Lord, and allow him to do his own will with us. One of the terms of the covenant to which we thus subscribe is, that, if we go astray he will chastise us with the rod. We must kiss the rod, and humble ourselves, when we are the Lord’s, and subscribe with our hand unto him; this implies, that we must be holy as he is holy; for without this necessary qualifica-

tion, we cannot enjoy him here or hereafter. “The Lord knoweth them that are his;” and the leading feature in their character is, that they depart from iniquity. We are by nature destitute of holiness, and cannot acceptably perform any duty. By subscribing, however, to the Lord, we resign ourselves to him, in order to be sanctified. It is in the lowest posture of humility and resignation we must receive grace. However, after all our efforts, we find by experience that our holiness is not complete, that we have not attained to Christian perfection. Every true Christian is perfect in his wish, in his aim, in his endeavour. In plain language, he would be perfect if he could.

Now, as we cannot satisfy the law, and as sin cleaves to our best duties, blessed be God that the covenant has provided us with a better righteousness than our own. To this righteousness we must subscribe, and appear before our God in the bright robes of our Redeemer’s obedience. Holiness qualifies for heaven; but the obedience of Christ is our charter. To say that the one takes away the necessity of the other, is to talk nonsense. The truth is, that such as prize the one will make conscience of the other. It is our duty to have faith, repentance, humility, and love, and the other graces of the Holy Spirit; but though we possessed them, we could not urge them as our plea for acceptance. Sometimes a cloud may arise upon the mind; darkness and deadness, dryness and hardness, may possess the heart. In such a case, we must not despond, but we must look to the righteousness of Christ. Let us cultivate holiness, but never lose sight of our Redeemer’s obedience. He is the Rock of ages, he procures the Holy Ghost for us; the Holy Ghost is the author of our holiness, and holiness is the source of our happiness. “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” It is impossible to cultivate holiness, except as we seek it from Christ. And for what purpose should we come to him, if our obedience were complete, and if our own righteousness were not as filthy rags. The truth is, if we formed a right judgment of our state, we should desire holiness as the spiritual health of our souls, and look to Christ’s righteousness as the foundation of our hopes and happiness. Let us understand these precious doctrines aright, and they will have the most salutary effects upon our moral conduct. We must come to Christ as sinners, and subscribe with our

hand unto the Lord ; we must prove that we have been sincere in doing so, by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this world, and adorning the gospel of the Saviour who bought us.

IV. We shall make some observations by way of improvement.

We have heard that the people of God may find themselves hard, and may be even so under the means of grace. Let us examine ourselves to find out the cause ; perhaps we may be indulging some sin. against the remonstrances of conscience ; this will produce hardness, and cause the Spirit to withdraw. Let us therefore beware of this, and listen to the divine monitor within.

But, perhaps, God, in his sovereignty, may be trying our faith and patience, as he tried holy Job formerly. We may not be conscious of any sin that might occasion our hardness, nor was he. In this case, let us wait upon God, and carry our hardness of heart to Christ ; he will soften us, and cause all this to work for our good.

To conclude, you find yourself empty. Poor soul ! you are hard and dry ; you are filthy and unclean ; your soul is polluted with the leprosy of sin ! Come, then, to the refreshing streams of the sanctuary ! come to the water of life ! come to Christ just as you are ! Take what you get, and be thankful ! How do you feel yourself ? A sinner ? Well ; here is a Saviour. He promises repentance ; depend upon it he will perform his word. Are you corrupt and filthy ? You are welcome to Christ : his blood can cleanse You : he reaches his hand to you : reach forward your hand to him ; he will not refuse you. Are you afraid of this ? You need not. His word, his very oath, is engaged to receive you. Whatever be your disease, he can give you a cure ; whatever is your want, he can give you supply. Come, then ; come as you are ; come, and welcome, to Christ. Whoever comes truly, will not be cast out ; let him take the water of life freely.

London : Printed by W. CLOWES and SONS, Duke Street, Lambeth, for THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY ; and sold at the Depository, 56, Paternoster Row, and 65, St. Paul's Churchyard ; by J. NISBET and Co., 21, Berners Street, Oxford Street ; and by other Booksellers.

[Price 2s. 4d. per 100.]

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